

Electronic Mail Standard S-TA-006-002
ITD Response to Network Administrator's Group Task Force Recommendations
February 20, 2001

ITD feels that there are 2 sets of issues related to the e-mail naming standard. One set of issues is raised by people who do not agree with the first.last@state.ia.us format. The 2nd set is related to potential implementations of the standard. The method of implementation has not been determined, and **we look forward to working with people with issues and suggestions to develop the system and procedures that provide the most benefit.**

Benefits from the Standard E-Mail Naming Convention

- The capability of having 2 or more addresses, known as aliases, that point to the same mailbox provides several benefits including allowing for employee mobility by allowing them to keep a common e-mail address as they move from agency to agency, and enabling task specific mail addresses (such as suggestion@state.ia.us) to be flexibly assigned to employees or mail distribution lists for handling.
- Most citizens do not know or care what agency a person works for. More and more, agencies are working together on common projects and systems and barriers between agencies and levels of government are blurring. Studies show that citizens want a common interface to all levels of government.
- The directory and naming convention would encompass all agencies. Currently, not all agencies are in the global e-mail directory. An on-line combined e-mail and phone directory is long overdue and would clearly enhance customer service and interagency communication.

Response to the Task Force Document

The cover letter for these recommendations states "The Task Force to discuss standard S-TA-006-002, as suggested at the December 28th ITMC meeting, has met and reached consensus on the enclosed recommendations." One of the individuals identified as a member of the task force has indicated that he did not agree with the recommendations, and did not want his name attached to them. He indicated that others listed felt the same way. Do these recommendations reflect the wishes of a subset of the Network Administrators' Group Task Force members who met to discuss the naming convention, or have they been discussed and endorsed by the group's membership?

The concerns cover 3 areas:

- 1) **Duplicate name confusion.** The agency identifier does not eliminate the problem of duplicate names, it reduces the probability that they will occur within a given mail system. There still needs to be a method of resolving duplicates in the standard and there is still the possibility that there will be confusion related to duplicate names in different agencies who choose to use an agency identifier (for example, John Smith at Public Defense or John Smith at Public Safety).

Resolving duplicates by adding numeric characters is not appealing, but there were lengthy discussions of this option, middle initials, etc. and no other more appealing option surfaced.

ITD feels that the problems with duplicate names should be addressed by making additional information (agency, phone number, etc) available in the directory entry for the individual.

We need to publish an HTML front end to query an LDAP directory conveniently referenced from a state web site. This should be populated with sufficient information to allow the sender to determine which of the "duplicate" addresses they want to send to.

There are several questions related to processes. ITD suggests that an implementation team be formed to develop procedures to address these questions as part of the implementation effort.

The issue of duplicate name confusion also is discussed as it relates to having 2 or more addresses, known as aliases, that point to the same mailbox (for example first.last@state.ia.us and

agencyconvention@agcy.state.ia.us. Some feel that this adds confusion. Our experience with Office Vision suggests otherwise. The alias function was used to exchange mail with Internet correspondents and over half of the customers found this function very helpful and voluntarily implemented it. There are people using or asking for this service on a regular basis (for example, MAX customers having their mail forwarded to agency e-mail systems). Moreover, given the mobility of employees within state government, an agency identifier causes more mail to be undeliverable unless aliases are used. Aliases also allow a user to have one agency mailbox and several addresses that may be specific to a job function (e.g. suggestionbox@agcy.state.ia.us). Finally, anyone who uses any listserv is already using a type of alias to get some of his or her email.

- 2) **Routing of mail changes from distributed to central processing.** Currently most mail goes directly to the mail server, bypassing the IowaHub. Implementation of the naming standard will not change this. To the extent that citizens send mail to a common, standardized domain and agencies choose to use such a domain, that mail will pass through whatever common system is chosen for implementation. This is not the same as saying it must be sent to a server with a single point of failure. ITD is building systems to host e-government applications with the necessary redundancy to guarantee no single point of failure.

There is a downside to having every mail server exchange messages directly with every other server. The number of connections that must be monitored increases geometrically. Each administrator must ensure that connections to every mail server are active, not just the connection to the central system.

- 3) **Increased cost to implement.** There are currently over 16,000 listings on the IowaHub. At \$1.25/month that amounts to \$20,000 per month or \$240,000 per year. We expect that we can implement a fully redundant, highly reliable system to replace this and implement the proposed naming convention for less than this amount.

There are 3 recommendations:

- 1) **E-mail addressing should be in the form of First.Last@agcy.state.ia.us.** This was discussed, but not adopted when the e-mail naming standard was under development. Moreover, most citizens do not know or care what agency a person works for. More and more, agencies are working together on common projects and systems and barriers between agencies and levels of government are blurring. Study after study shows that citizens (remember, they are the people we work for and they matter more than small IT concerns), want a common interface to all levels of government.
- 2) **Route e-mail directly to an agency's post office and not through a central server, as applicable.** The standard does not prevent e-mail users from publishing and using their agency specific address. This allows e-mail to route directly to agency post offices. This will likely comprise over 90% of email.
- 3) **Post e-mail addresses for both names and processes on the web.** ITD agrees 100% with this recommendation, especially since not all agencies are even in the global email directory. This is one of the benefits the standard is intended to achieve. An online combined email and phone directory is long overdue and would clearly enhance customer service and interagency communication.